

VA**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

News Release

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Washington, D.C. -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is establishing 42 more community-based outpatient clinics around the country -- improving accessibility to health care for America's veterans.

These clinics bring to 574 the total number of VA outpatient clinics nationwide now in operation or in the process of being activated -- including 163 at VA medical centers.

"VA is committed to providing care for veterans in the most clinically appropriate setting. These new clinics symbolize our transition to an organization that provides a truly coordinated continuum of care grounded in ambulatory and primary care," VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Kenneth W. Kizer said.

"The new clinics will be offering a broad range of general medical services such as management of diabetes, hypertension or coronary artery disease, pharmacy services or preventive care, such as vision or cholesterol screening," Kizer said. "No new tax dollars have been used to establish the nearly 200 community-based outpatient clinics," he added.

Some of the new clinics will be located in existing space in the community to be leased by VA, while others may provide services through a contract with an existing community service provider, such as a private group practice.

Today's clinic announcement marks the fruition of a grassroots planning effort by VA's Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) in partnership with local veterans, labor organizations, and Congressional interests to find the best balance of ways to provide health care.

In addition to the new community-based outpatient clinics, primary care clinics were added to 30 counseling centers (Vet Centers) at the end of 1997. This is part of a general expansion of VA outpatient services through a re-engineering of the VA medical system to make high-quality health care available closer to veterans' homes.

The expansion of community-based outpatient clinics over the last two years has, in part, been made possible by savings in other areas. For example, management of 42 VA medical centers has been consolidated into 20 integrated facilities which can now provide improved clinical services with no reduction in access to care.

VA has closed 22,580, or 43 percent, of its acute care hospital beds since 1994 -- with a corresponding decrease of more than 250,000 inpatient admissions per year. Over the same period, outpatient visits have risen by 6.6 million, for a total of more than 32.6 million clinic visits in 1997.